

A-haunting we will go

By Alison Cohen

Ghosties.
Check.
Ghoulies.
Check.
Long-leggetty beasties.
Check.
Things that go bump in the night.
Check!

Every town on the South Shore seems to come fully equipped with a ghost story or two. Cynics and scientists try to explain them away: uneven settling makes doors creak shut or pop open, expanding and contracting wood makes strange noises in the night, and of course, it's the night wind that produces those heart-wrenching moans that wake us up out of a sound sleep.

Hogwash and tommy rot.

We long for the romance of unrequited love. We crave tragic tales of death on dark and stormy nights. We want spooky tales about witches and little lost boys and maniacal murderers to keep us up all night. So go get a bowl of popcorn and some hot, mulled cider, and gather by the firelight. We'll take you on a tour of some of our favorite haunts along the South Shore.

Begin here, in Hingham, at the house Abraham Lincoln's forebear, Samuel Lincoln built on North Street. The house was built in 1698 and added onto by succeeding generations, with the last addition made in 1992. Today it is home to Ronald and Barbara Schmitt, their children and one friendly ghost.

No, this isn't Casper. It's Sea Captain Hobart, as confirmed by 13-year-old Lorelei Schmitt's Ouija board. As the story goes, and has gone for more than two centuries, then-owner Captain Hobart was a man who liked his grog once the sun was over the yardarm. One evening back in the 1770s, Hobart was in his cups, had a fit, fell into the huge fireplace and died. Ever since, Hobart has been a presence about the house, generally appearing as a blue mist, although the Schmitt children claim to have seen him in more human form.

The Schmitts first learned the house was inhabited by a ghost when they toured the house prior to buying it in 1993. Then owners, Ray and Leslie Norton, had a newspaper column about the ghost of Sam Lincoln's house framed in the bathroom. That was the closest the Nortons ever got to Hobart.

"We never had any contact with him, although people used to say to us, 'Oh my god, you live in THAT house,'" Leslie Norton said.

The Schmitts have good reason to be favorably disposed to Hobart. They credit him for saving the tinder-dry antique house from conflagration. According to Barbara Schmitt, one of the members of the household left a candle burning in the same room where Captain Hobart perished.

"Three hours later, there was a deep char mark in the table and you could see where the wax had run along the table but it never dripped onto the carpeting," Barbara says. "We assume that Hobart felt if he couldn't burn the house down, neither could we."

Journey with us down the road apiece to the village of Cohasset.

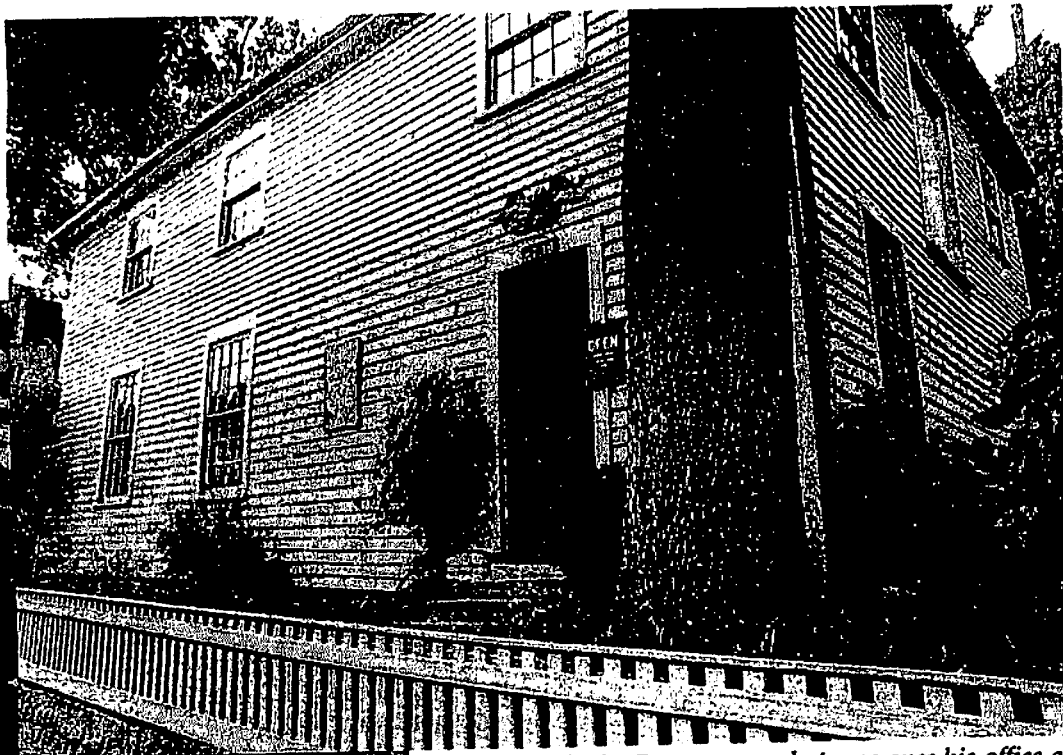
It's long been rumored that Captain John Bates got into full snit and high dudgeon when his chandlery, or ship's store, was moved from its original moorings. Giving vent to his feelings took some time, though, since Bates had been dead 75 years or more before the building was removed from its harborside site to the village proper.

"The building was built in the mid-1700s by Samuel Bates, who also owned a fleet of ships," town historian David Wadsworth says. "It remained in the Bates family from about 1760 to the 1880s. The last member of the family to own it was John Bates, who also had a fleet."

Around 1956 or 1957, the building was donated to the Cohasset Historical Society. The society moved it to its present site, at the junction of Main and Elm Streets, and converted it to a museum that celebrates Cohasset's long seafaring history.

It wouldn't take long before the museum's curators began sensing an otherworldly presence, generally in the form of mysterious pacing on the second floor office once occupied by Bates.

Alan Chapman photos



The spirit of John Bates paces what was once his office at Cohasset's Maritime Museum.



"One night, the historical society was holding a meeting at the museum," David recollects. "They heard the noise of someone pacing back and forth up on the second floor, but no one was supposed to be up there. They sent the curator up there to investigate. No one was there."

The tales of Cohasset's haunted museum came to the attention of famous ghost hunter Hans Holzer. Holzer visited the museum, but, David says, the ghost did not favor him with an appearance. Never one to let the lack of direct empirical evidence get in the way of a good story, Holzer featured the tale in a chapter of one of his books.

"Holzer is the one who came to the conclusion that it was John Bates haunting the building," David says. "He said it was because Bates was unhappy the building had been moved."

The building is open to the public from mid-June through September, Tuesday through Sunday, from 1:30-4:30 p.m., with the caveat, weather permitting, because the building is unheated and lacks electricity. Don't go expecting to confront the shade of John Bates — according to David, a previous curator believes Bates has left. Perhaps he is satisfied that the building is in good hands.

Of course, it's always possible that Bates will stop by to check out his old office, and rummage around in his desk drawers. You'll be able to recognize the old guy if you check out his portrait first. For more information about the Maritime Museum, call (617) 383-6930.

Men who go down to the sea in ships know too often many of their number don't come back home — at least not in the flesh. Seafaring is a dangerous business, not a fit career for the faint of heart. Lighthouses and the brave men who man them are often the only thing standing between sailors and certain death and destruction.

The rocky waters off Cohasset and Scituate have claimed countless ships and sailors. In just a 30-year period in the early 1800s, 40 lives were lost near the entrance to Cohasset Harbor. The engineers at the time recommended building a lighthouse far enough out to sea to warn ships before they crashed on the rocks. Minot's Ledge was deemed the perfect spot.

The first lighthouse, begun in 1847 and completed in 1850, was built on the cheap. To save money, the engineers opted to build it upon iron legs, theorizing that the waves would pass harmlessly through the "stilts."

During the very first storm, the three lighthouse keepers discovered that the entire structure vibrated and swayed with the force of the winds and waves. Structural engineers discounted the keepers' concerns in that first year of operation, sure the lighthouse they built was perfectly safe. It would take the collapse of the lighthouse and the death of two assistant keepers, Joseph Wilson and Joseph Antoine, in a raging storm on April 16, 1851, to convince the engineers otherwise.

Around midnight, as the tide rushed in, the battered and listing keeper's quarters fell into the sea. Antoine's body washed ashore at Nantasket. Although Wilson managed to swim ashore, he died on the shores of the Glades from his injuries and exposure.

Although Antoine lost his life in the line of duty, many local sailors claim he's still on the job. His ghost has been spotted clinging to the exterior 40-foot ladder that is the only way to get from the ledge to the keeper's quarters.

"They say he stands on the ladder in bad storms and waves sailors away from the rocks," Wadsworth said.

It's definitely a daunting task to get from the rocky shores of Cohasset and North Scituate to Minot's Light. If you'd like to play at being a keeper without having to brave the waves and rocks, be sure to check out the lighthouse replica constructed on Government Island in Cohasset. Government Island is located near Kimball's-By-the-Sea and Chart House restaurants. The entrance is near the spot where Border Street takes an abrupt hairpin turn at the ledges.

An early history of Scituate also gives an accounting of an early haunted house story. According to Samuel Deane's history of Scituate, the Lathrop Litchfield house, in what was then called the Beach woods section in northwestern Scituate, was reputed to be haunted back in 1790 or so.

According to Deane, several people investigated and reported they heard a knocking sound in one of Litchfield's closets for which no explanation could be found. The knocking went on almost daily.

No one knew who or what was making noise in Lathrop Litchfield's house, but there are no such mysteries at the Historic Winslow House in Marshfield. Footsteps in the bedroom, power outages, and the mystery of the appearing and disappearing salt are all

accounts laid at the feet of Penelope Pelham Winslow.

Penelope Pelham married Gov. Josiah Winslow in 1651. Winslow was the son of Edward Winslow, a Mayflower passenger and three times the governor of Plymouth County. Although Penelope and Josiah were married in England, they came home to the 1,000-acre land grant given to his father and named after the family's ancestral home, Careswell.

Life would not be carefree for Penelope Winslow. She and Josiah lived with his parents, Edward and Susanna White Winslow.

Although her father-in-law died four years after Penelope came into the family, her mother-in-law would live another 55 years. When Susanna Winslow died in 1680, poor Penelope still lost out on her chance to be head of the household: Josiah died the same year and Penelope had to spend the remaining years of her life in her daughter-in-law's home.

Some say the unaccountable chills that fill the room, the sound of footsteps on the staircases and the little piles of salt that would appear in the kitchen each morning, be swept up by the caretakers only to reappear the next morning, are all examples of Penelope's restless spirit longing to fill the role of sole mistress of the manor.

Curator Beverley Thomas has another theory. She points to the portrait of Penelope Pelham Winslow in the great hall. It shows — and we're trying to be tactful here — a woman unlikely to win any beauty contests. Since contemporary descriptions gush about her grace and charm, Beverley quips that Penelope may be walking the floors hoping to get her hands on the artist who painted her so badly.

Television shows catering to lovers of the supernatural and the occult have come begging, but the Board of Trustees has resisted entreaties to allow them to do shows focusing on the haunting of Careswell. And well they should.

Even a casual visitor to the historic Winslow house, built in 1699 by Penelope's son, Isaac Winslow, can sense something of the people who called this magnificent house their home. The ghosts of these long-gone Winslows glimmer from the shadowy corners and whisper along the walls. The house is a treasure trove, with memorabilia dating back to Mayflower days.

Because the house remains true to its 17th century origins and has never been modernized to include central heat or electricity, the house is only open for tours from mid-June through mid-October, Wednesday through Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m. The house is located at the intersection of Route 139 and Webster Street, in the Green Harbor section of Marshfield. Tea is served on Sunday and there is a Tuesday morning coffee and lecture series. Daniel Webster's law office stands on the grounds as well. For more information, call (617)-837-5753.



Alan Chapman photo



Penelope Pelham Winslow still haunts her Marshfield home, The Winslow House.



J. Paul MacDonald photo

Jacobs Farm in Norwell

No one seems to know just who the child with the golden ringlets may be, but Joyanne Bond and her children came to know the tousle-haired tow-head by sight — and by the pranks he or she played while the Bonds lived in Norwell's Jacobs Farmhouse back in the 1970s. Bond estimates the youthful ghost was about 5 or 6 years old. Although the child appeared to be wearing a dress, that sort of outfit was common for both girls and young boys in an earlier time.

"My son Jonathan was looking out his bedroom window and saw a little blond-headed child waving to him from over by the barn," Joyanne. "He went running out to play with the child, but no one was there."

The mischievous child would appear to the children many times, both in the house and in the barn. On other occasions, he'd just help himself to the Bond children's things when they weren't around.

"The children's toys and things would disappear, never to be found again," Joyanne says, "especially bright or shiny things. My daughter's barrettes were always a favorite."

Joyanne did some research into the Jacobs family, who lived in the house from 1726 to 1935, but was unable to find a child who died at the age of 5 or 6.

The child may not be the only ghost in residence at the home built in 1726 by Joshua Jacobs

and expanded over the years to accommodate the growing Jacobs family.

"I always felt as if someone was looking over my shoulder," Joyanne said. "For the first six months, it seemed as if someone was following me around, making sure I was doing what's right by the house."

The sensation was so strong, Joyanne would ask the previous overseers, "Did you ever experience anything a little odd in the house?" They laughed in response, but not because they found the question odd. Indeed, Joyanne in turn was called by her successor as overseer and asked, "Is there something funning going on around here?"

"It wasn't scary," she explains. "It was almost as if you could see something out of the corner of your eye, but when you turned around, there was nothing there except a feeling. It seemed very protective of the house and property."

The Jacobs Farmhouse is one of several properties under the care of the Norwell Historical Society. The farmhouse is actually two houses in one, a fact that is most obvious from the rear of the house.

The farmhouse is located at the intersection of Rte. 123 and Jacobs Lane. For information about tours and special events at the farmhouse, contact the historical society at (617) 659-1888.

The ghosts of Jacobs Lane aren't the only restless spirits in Norwell.

"Every now and then, when I'm sitting at the library desk I hear someone coming down the back stairs," says librarian Ruth Bailey of the James Library. "The sound is distinctive because the stairs are uncarpeted. And you hear footsteps up in the second floor hall quite a bit. But there's never anyone there."

Both Ruth and former librarian Darlene Beauvais have heard and spoken to the ghost of the James Library. There the similarities end — their experiences seem so different that Darlene believes the James Library must have more than one ghost haunting its stacks.

Ruth believes her ghost is quite benevolent. Oh, to be sure, there was that one incident with the books. "A book popped out of the shelf behind me," she says. "It flew a good way across the room before it dropped onto the floor."

Ruth isn't sure what book came sailing out of the stacks. All she recalls is that it was a juvenile title. She just reshelved the book and told the ghost to behave himself. Even ghosts, it seems, are subject to being shushed by librarians when they misbehave. "I also told him we were taking good care of the library," Ruth says.

Darlene first encountered the ghost back in the mid- to late 1970s. "I felt such a strong presence. It was such an unhappy presence."

Even today, Darlene is uncomfortable discussing the ghost, because the conversation stirs up such unpleasant feelings and memories. Perhaps the most dramatic encounter anyone had with the ghost came on the day that Atlas Alarm started working in the building in the mid-1980s. The work was being done by a young man who had to go up into the attic to string some wire.

"All of a sudden he came running down the stairs," Darlene recalls. "He was as white as a ghost and was visibly shaking. He said, 'I'm not going back up in that place. That woman won't let me alone.'"

The worker stayed outside until his employer returned. Then the two of them went up, but whatever or whoever had troubled the young man simply did not manifest itself to the other man.

"It was clear his boss didn't believe him, but he was truly terrified," Darlene says. "He just kept saying 'I don't want to talk about it, I don't want to talk about it,' but he was shaken and white.

This wasn't at night. It was in broad daylight."

Darlene finally confronted the spirit, telling it that she couldn't and wouldn't get involved in its troubles, believing that this was a deeply disturbed and unhappy presence.

"I never even sensed the presence after that," Darlene says. "That was about a year before I left the James."

The library is open to the public Monday through Friday, from 2-5 p.m., and Saturdays, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Flying objects aren't the province of the James Library alone. Back around 1912 or so, things were really topsy-turvy at the rectory of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Hanover.

According to old clippings, the problems began in the late afternoon on a Saturday in July. A committee holding a meeting to plan a church picnic heard mysterious knockings from the second floor, but could find no one and nothing to account for them. Later that same evening, the parish priest, the Rev. Father Charles Donohue, his housekeeper and her friend were in the parlor when suddenly all hell broke loose in the kitchen.

According to a news article printed a few days later, the three went to investigate and discovered the kitchen table had been overturned and its sturdy legs broken. When they returned to the front part of the house, they found the organ stool broken, its screws loosened and strewn about, and the metal braces bent.

More noise from the kitchen sent them running to the back of the house again. This time, two glass jars of jelly had been thrown about the kitchen and many other items were out of place.

Around 1 a.m., Father Donohue was wakened out of a sound sleep when his alarm clock flew across the room and crashed into a wall. Later the clock flew out of the room, down the stairs and was broken into smithereens.

Weird things continued to happen. According to news accounts, a vase full of flowers danced off its pedestal and a clothes tree "walked upon unseen legs, fell down the front stairs, and was broken."

No part of the house seemed immune. A bed broke and its sheets and blankets were strewn about. A coffee pot careened about on a tray and tipped its contents out. Even a bunch of cynical reporters, camped out in the rectory, were terrorized when they heard the tramping sound of heavy footsteps. Then the very house shook and lights broke off in their sockets. When one intrepid reporter went to investigate further, he was violently hurled backward and drenched with a torrent of icy water that cascaded down the stairs.

In the midst of all this tumult, Fr. Donohue abandoned the rectory and took refuge with another family. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, all the strange occurrences simply stopped. For more than 70 years, the house on Broadway has been a private family home — and in the same family for the past 40 years. No one has seen or heard anything out of the ordinary in all that time.



J. Paul MacDonald photo

A poltergeist haunted this former rectory in Hanover.

Historical houses

8/9

Our tour ends in Duxbury, site of at least three ghostly happenings, all carefully chronicled in Margery L. MacMillan's delightful "Stopping Places Along Duxbury Roads."

The ghost of the newly renovated Sun Tavern has become one of the most chronicled ghost stories of late. As the tale is told and retold, the house, a portion of which dates back to 1741, is haunted by Lysander C. Walker. Walker, a despondent 79-year-old widower from Pembroke, so the story goes, shot himself in the house on Oct. 23, 1928. His body was discovered by a young girl.

Both the current and former owners report hearing mysterious footsteps, finding lights turned on or off, experience sudden chills and have seen objects moving by an unseen hand. If you'd like to sample the fare and invite Lysander to join you for dessert, you'll find the Sun Tavern at 500 Congress St.

Greengate Farm and Kennels is just a hoop and a holler down the road from the Sun Tavern. The owners raise champion golden retrievers and cocker spaniels, and board other dogs. The big old farm house that dates back to the 1730s also plays host to the ghost of a young soldier who had been wounded in the Indian Wars and took refuge in the house.

The young man is said to have fallen in love with a daughter of the Randall family, who owned the house for some 200 years. Unfortunately, the young man died of his wounds. Both the current and former owners believe the young man wanders the house, looking for his lady love. He announces his presence in typical ghostly fashion — he plays with the controls to the furnace and the lights switches, fiddles with door latches and plays the piano.

The dogs in residence can often sense his presence, and react by growling or howling. On at least two occasions, he has startled the occupants of the house by appearing in their bedrooms dressed all in black and wearing a tricorn hat.



Alan Chapman photo

Hayden Mason points to the second floor which a Revolutionary War spirit haunts in Duxbury.

The Benjamin Prior Farm on Depot Street also has a ghost in residence, but this is one with a difference. The house, now owned by Morgan Lamarche, is haunted by the last Indian living in Duxbury.

According to local histories, Hitty and her husband, Tom, were the last two Native Americans to live in town. Their camp was along Camp Shore Island Creek. When Tom died, Hitty became known as Hitty Tom.

According to this research, Hitty and the local Duxbury people lived in peace and harmony. All of that ended when Hitty died and the town split into two factions over the fate of her body.

"One faction would bury her in the town burial ground," Morgan says. The other group did think it appropriate for good Christians to share eternity cheek by jowl with a heathen Native American.

Apparently Benjamin Prior's descendant, Eliphaz Prior, was a free thinker and an altruist. He ended the controversy by burying Hitty Tom on his land. He also jammed it to the naysayers by burying Hitty on the southerly end of his farm, directly adjacent to the burial ground.

"Only a fence separated Hitty Tom from the burying ground," Morgan says.

In later years, the section of Prior Farm that contained Hitty Tom's gravesite was cut off from the rest of the land by the railroad. Her final resting place, like those of many of the men who opposed burying her in the town cemetery, is unmarked and unknown.

Over the years, however, tales have been told about ghostly happenings in the Prior house. Many believe her spirit hovers over the house of her last benefactor.

Now, you may be sitting there saying, "I don't believe in ghosts," but if you can believe our sources, the real question may be "Do the ghosts believe in you?"

Play it safe and don't tempt fate between now and All Hallow's Eve. Don't whistle past a cemetery. Don't let an unoccupied rocking chair rock. Avoid walking beneath ladders and, when in doubt, just keep repeating that old Scots prayer: *From ghosties and ghoulies and long leggetty beasties and things that go bump in the night, dear God, protect us.* 🍀